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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 ANKARA 005606

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: HONOR KILLINGS AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: PROGRESS IN  
TURKEY

REF: A. ANKARA 5584

[B](#). ANKARA 3973

[C](#). ISTANBUL 403

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner for reasons 1.4 (b)  
, (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Since the July release of a government circular aimed at preventing honor killings and domestic violence, public awareness and media coverage of violence against women has significantly increased in Turkey, according to our contacts. Experts note that the incidence of domestic violence and honor killings had risen steadily over the past five years, leading Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to call for implementation of the emergency measures outlined in the circular. Most of our contacts welcomed the circular's release but said it was too early to estimate the degree to which it might catalyze change. No one we met with was optimistic about eliminating honor killings in the near future, which remain strongly tied to traditional gender roles and family honor. While the circular focuses welcome attention on a highly sensitive issue, the lack of mechanisms to implement the proposed preventative measures undermines its effectiveness. Real change is likely only to come with improvements in women's status and economic development within Turkish society. End summary.

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GOVERNMENT ACTION AGAINST VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN  
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[1](#)2. (U) Following well-publicized incidents earlier this year (ref C), the Turkish Prime Ministry issued a circular this summer that lists steps to prevent honor killings and other violence directed toward women and children. Based on a report issued by the Turkish parliament's ad hoc committee, the circular builds on stiffer sentencing provisions instituted for honor killings under 2005 revisions to Turkey's penal code. Prosecutors can now charge all family members who participate in planning an honor killing, rather than just the actual perpetrator, in an effort to end-run the trend of having minors carry out the murder for their families to escape harsher sentencing. (Note: traditionally, male family members convene to decide whether or not to kill a female family member. End note.)

[1](#)3. (U) Release of the circular focused more media attention

on the violence against women problem, which several women's NGO representatives told us is an effective way to raise public awareness. Prime Minister Erdogan emphasized the responsibility to carry out the measures in the circular lies not only with the public sector, but also with the NGO community and ordinary citizens. The PM designated the Directorate General for the Status of Women as the coordinator for violence against women and honor killings.

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CULTURAL DIMENSIONS ARE KEY  
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¶4. (C) Our women's groups contacts agreed that tradition is central to the problem of violence against women in Turkey. As women enter the workforce and gain social equality with men, the cultural attitudes toward domestic violence and honor killings will begin to change. Women are still considered by many in Turkey to be de facto men's property, according to Erbu Hanby of the Women's Salvation Foundation. Educated women are less willing to talk about violence within the home, while those with less education had an easier time identifying with victims of violence and articulating their own experiences, according to our contacts.

¶5. (C) Our contacts viewed the PM's circular as a positive outcome of the efforts and demands of women activists. EU accession process reforms are also encouraging change, they said, and government activities on the issue are having a positive influence on Turkish society in general. With only one exception, all of our contacts expressed optimism about the circular's potential positive impact.

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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: SHELTERS NEEDED  
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¶6. (C) While women's organization representatives we met with expressed an urgent need to address domestic violence in Turkey, all initially were defensive and quick to point out that domestic violence is a problem worldwide, citing examples of violence and discrimination against women in the U.S. and western European countries. Although awareness of this issue and women's recognition of violence inside the home has improved, they told us there is still a long way to go. Seren Dogan, from the NGO Flying Broom, noted that greater media coverage of the issue should not be mistaken for an increase in occurrence; domestic violence has always been around but is not something people usually address publicly. Penalties for domestic violence charges were stiffened in early 2000, according to our contacts, but police officers reluctantly took women's reports of abuse and continued to turn them away on grounds that these were considered home matters.<sup>8</sup> Our contacts noted some recent positive changes in the way these cases are being processed and in the overall willingness of the police to hear them.

¶7. (C) Despite signs of progress from the government on the issue of domestic violence, there is still no functional mechanism or regular allocation of resources for shelters or help for battered women and children. All of the women's NGO representatives raised the issue of insufficient shelter space for battered women. A new law requires all municipalities with a population of over 50,000 to open a battered women's shelter. Because there is no enforcement mechanism to oversee implementation of this provision, the opening of shelters often falls to local municipalities. The NGO representatives we met also expressed concern that there are no independent or non-government affiliated shelters for women. According to Hanby of the Women's Salvation Foundation, there are a total of 29 shelters in Turkey ) 12 run by municipalities and 17 by social services. Some municipalities have taken the initiative with women's groups to establish information centers and shelters with trained

personnel, such as in Ankara. Hanbay told us that her NGO has worked with the Tarsus municipality in southern Turkey to open a municipal shelter and information center.

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HONOR KILLINGS TIED TO ENTRENCHED CONSERVATIVE TRADITIONS  
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¶18. (C) According to Flying Broom's Dogan, honor killings are an issue that women's NGOs are approached about the least because of women's reluctance to talk with outsiders. In rural provinces where women spend most of their time inside the home, it is difficult for them to escape or to find someone to talk to about a threatening situation, Dogan said. Women are more willing to raise and discuss discriminatory treatment by fathers or brothers toward female children in their family, she commented.

¶19. (C) Ayse Sucu, President of Diyanet Foundation's Women's Auxiliary Board (ref A), said rapid urbanization in the last 10-15 years has further complicated the issue. She blamed traditional conservative attitudes for the high incidence of honor killings, adding that migrants carry the custom with them as they move to big cities and abroad. By failing to integrate newcomers into city life and society, urbanization allows such practices to continue. In contrast, she noted that women and men were required to abide by a city dress code in the 1950's and were prohibited from wearing village attire in public. Sucu referred to several Koranic verses that she interpreted as advising believers not to blindly follow their ancestor's beliefs and customs, as they might not be appropriate. In order for men's views toward women and honor killings to change, Sucu said, women must integrate into Turkey's economic and social life, particularly in the southeastern and eastern provinces where women are more often confined to their homes.

¶10. (C) Although honor killings occur everywhere in Turkey, the media disproportionately cover cases in the eastern and southeastern provinces, creating the impression that honor

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killings are a southeastern phenomena, according to Hanbay. Most women throughout Turkey are killed by people they know, she added, such as fathers, brothers, cousins, husbands or boyfriends who are often driven by the motive of protecting male or family honor. Hanby pointed out that many homicides of women go undetected as honor killings because they occur in more modern western provinces such as Izmir and Canakkale. Cosmopolitan Istanbul ranked first in honor killings one year, in part because of its high percentage of rural migrants.

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LIMITED DISSEMINATION OF THE CIRCULAR, TRADITIONAL VALUES  
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¶11. (C) Although the government specifically called for wide dissemination of the PM's circular, two muftis near Turkey's capital told us they had not heard about it. (Note: One of the muftis was from the Mamak suburb of Ankara, while the other lived in the Haymana subprovince, within a 70km distance of the capital. End note.) Both muftis commented, however, that they gave "hutbas" (sermons) about violence against women in the past. In a separate meeting, Ayse Sucu noted that hutbas have addressed domestic violence, but said that telling people it is a sin will not stop those who follow deeply held traditional convictions, particularly in eastern and southeastern Turkey. A tradition of raising children by threatening them or screaming at them reinforces a culture of violence, Sucu claimed. Extremely conservative attitudes also contribute, although Sucu noted that many cultures have conservative views toward women, not just Turkey.

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¶12. (C) Of the approximately 100 women's groups in Turkey, Hanbay told us that around 50 work on domestic violence as part of their activities. Most women's groups in Turkey were founded in the 1980s and early 1990's by women activists who were part of the women's movement in the early eighties, Hanbay said, although there had been women activists during the Ottoman period as well. The relatively late arrival of women's rights activists on the Turkish public scene reflects the overall position of women in Turkish society, she explained. According to one UNDP poll, even in developed provinces such as Izmir, only around 25% of women are employed (ref B). Women who stay home, which is overwhelmingly the case in southeastern Turkey and interior Anatolian provinces, are more likely to become victims of domestic violence.

¶13. (C) Hanbay said most NGOs for women are fighting against sexual discrimination, or "siddet", in employment and education. (Note: Violence or "siddet" has a broader meaning in Turkey and covers what would ordinarily be considered discrimination in the U.S. For example, most Turks characterize sexual discrimination in education and employment as &siddet8 (violence). Domestic violence falls under the umbrella of "siddet", or violence toward women, and does not appear to be the foremost concern of women's' NGOs. End note.) Hanbay, for example, stressed that campaigns to encourage more women representatives form a big part of NGOs' activities. The Diyanet's Sucu, echoing comments by other contacts, stated that domestic violence can only be fought with education and economic development.

¶14. (C) Women's NGOs in Turkey are strapped for money and rely on foreign donor projects to finance themselves, which leaves them little freedom to choose their activities or priorities. Some women's NGOs, such as Kirkoruk, which identifies itself as an organization to help women suffering from violence, are clouded by political agendas. Fatma Vrigil, a Kirkoruk president, pointed out several times during our meeting that their staff was half Kurdish and that the root of violence in Turkish society was the unresolved Kurdish question in the southeast. These kinds of competing motivations and project-oriented activities of NGOs seem to further undermine the ability of the organizations to work directly on domestic violence or with battered women.

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COMMENT  
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¶15. (C) Most of our contacts agree that education and media coverage are powerful tools in combating honor killings and domestic violence. But women's NGO representatives also stressed the importance of improving women's status, equal opportunity and financial independence in changing societal norms and values. While many Turkish women are open to reform, our contacts seemed to agree that Turkish attitudes toward women need to evolve to allow women to become an integral part of society before honor killings and domestic violence will become relics of the past. With EU pressure, Turkey has incentive to make concrete progress. The PM's circular on violence against women is an encouraging step toward changing societal values. As with other reform issues, Turkey must take the next step and effectively implement the laws and reforms it has enacted.

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